

President's proposed budget for Health Care in the Veterans Affairs (VA) fiscal year 2004. Americans freedom is due to the men and women in uniform who have fought and continue to fight for us. They are the Nation's heroes, who are one of America's greatest and vital assets, to whom we owe a great debt. One way we can repay this debt is through the provision of good health care to them. Many veterans and men and women in uniform according to the American Veterans (AMVET) will agree with me that high quality health care is one of their most important benefits. Nevertheless, the President is repaying the debt we owe to them by cutting their health care benefits.

The President's budget of \$27.5 billion is \$2.5 billion less than what it cost to provide health care to veterans under current law in 2004. This is as a result of suspending health care enrollment of Priority 8 veterans, which will deny care to 173,000 veterans nationwide. Of the 173,000 veterans denied approximately 7,160 reside in Illinois and approximately 4,000 would have enrolled at VA facilities in the Chicago area. Nationwide, an estimated 300,000 veterans in 2002, were placed on waiting list or forced to wait for over 6 months in order for them to get an appointment for health care. Now we are going to tell over 50 percent of these people who have been expecting this benefit and bleed for their country, that we appreciate their service and are thanking them by refusing them health care access. Denying them health care tells them how much we value their service to the country and their lives. This is incomprehensible.

The budget now requires an additional annual enrollment fee of \$250 for those already in the VA health care system. This will force approximately 1.25 million enrolled veterans including 425,000 active patients nationwide to drop out of the health care system due to the increased costs. In the state of Illinois, there are approximately 105,210 priority 7 and 8 veterans enrolled in the VA health care system, which will lead to an estimated 58,000 veterans dropping out due to this cost. Also, approximately 42,000 Chicago veterans and active patients would be forced to drop out of VA care due to the new fees. This new fee is telling our veterans and active men and women in uniform that their suffering for our freedom is not enough for them to earn health care benefits that they still have to pay for it.

Furthermore, those who remain in the VA health care system, will pay a lot more than they used to pay. In the State of Illinois an estimated 47,000 Priority 7 and 8 veterans will remain in the VA health care system, which will mean that their cost for VA care will increase by an estimated \$16 million annually. Out of these Illinois veterans approximately 26,000 veterans are enrolled in Chicago VA facilities, their VA care cost will increase annually by an estimated \$9.1 million.

Overall due to being excluded from signing up and the increased fee for VA care, approximately 65,000 Illinois 15 veterans, including 36,000 veterans in Chicago VA facilities, will lose access to VA health care. This is no way to treat our Veterans—in fact we should be ashamed. We can do better and we must begin by taking care of those who have given so much—our Veterans.

RECOGNIZING KNOXVILLE NEWS-SENTINEL

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, in these challenging economic times it is important to recognize individuals and companies that invest in our future. Last month, I helped celebrate just such an investment in my district—the state-of-the-art office and production facility for the Knoxville News Sentinel, East Tennessee's largest newspaper.

This paper has been based in downtown Knoxville since its first issue in 1886. It now educates and informs more than 400,000 people every week and supports a wide variety of local civic, charitable and education organizations.

The News Sentinel has taken its community involvement a giant step further by building its \$50 million headquarters in a formerly underserved part of Knoxville's city center and by bringing on-line one of the most sophisticated printing presses in the United States. The paper's parent company, E.W. Scripps, also bases its highly successful cable networks and Internet services in Knoxville.

East Tennessee is one of the best places in our Nation to do business. I applaud the News-Sentinel and E.W. Scripps for having the foresight to invest in this dynamic community.

OUR TROOPS IN IRAQ AND THE FAMILIES AT HOME MUST HAVE STEEL IN THEIR SPINES

HON. DOUG BEREUTER

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, as our troops move into Baghdad, countless Americans are watching as embedded reporters use 21st century technology to relay the bloodshed and horror of the battlefield into their living rooms. These images cannot help but have a profound impact on all of us. We would be well advised to heed the advice of Winston Churchill that, "Nothing is more dangerous in wartime than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of a Gallup Poll, always feeling one's pulse and taking one's temperature."

A timely editorial published in the Omaha World-Herald on Saturday, March 29, 2003, reflects the situation Americans face in Iraq and on the homefront. This member commends it to his colleagues, especially noting its recommendations that only unconditional victory now will suffice.

[From the Omaha Daily Herald, Mar. 29, 2003]

BAGHDAD BOUND

Wars, many have observed, don't follow scripts. Certainly the one in Iraq underscores the point.

It is not turning out to be as quick or as clean as many seasoned observers, including some highly placed military officials, had hoped. But as the second week began, positive developments emerged.

The (official) start of the war met with unexpected contingencies. First came one of the worst sand-storms in modern memory.

Only those who have experienced a major and prolonged storm of that kind can begin to imagine what it would be like to pursue a military engagement under such conditions. Another surprise has been the tenacity of some of the Iraqi soliders. They may not be the best-trained fighters, but desperation and zealotry combined have kept them in the battle longer than many expected.

Desperation and zealotry have also led to some despicable dirty tricks—war crimes, really. Much of this was expected, but is no less infuriating for that fact: Fighting from hospitals. Fake surrenders that become massacres. Forced human shields. Apparent executions of prisoners and Iraqi civilians. And more. But the tide does appear to be turning. Massive bombs are shattering strategic targets in Baghdad. Ground forces are speeding up, and bit by bit they are securing the ever-important supply line all the way back to the Persian Gulf. Helicopters (for which sand-storms are a curse) are back in the air, laying down lethal fire and ferrying troops.

Additionally, thousands of Iraqi citizens, once they feel reasonably secure, have begun to flee to safety behind American and British lines. There they are being fed and medically treated as necessary, affirming that the allies truly are on the scene as rescuers.

None of that makes this a stroll on the beach. Baghdad will be tough to pacify. Casualties among the liberators are rising. Some innocent Iraqis, inevitably, are dying. That makes this the point at which the troops—and we would add, their loved ones at home—must have some steel in their spines.

The only sensible course now is unconditional victory. The allies can win it, and we believe they will. Chapter 2 will be winning the peace.

THE PHASE III IMPLEMENTATION ACT

HON. HOWARD COBLE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Phase III Implementation Act.

I believe the time has come for Congress to find a way to break the current stalemate on the tobacco buyout issue. To that end, I am calling for the creation of a non-federal trust fund—similar to the Phase II trust fund created by the 1998 multi-state settlement agreement—to provide buyout payments to tobacco quota holders and growers. This new "Phase III" Trust Fund would be coupled with tobacco program modernization which is addressed in the legislation I am introducing today.

There are three major objectives motivating this legislation. First, Congress needs to undertake major reform and modernization of the federal tobacco program. Second, we need to encourage a dialogue on alternative ways to fund a tobacco quota buyout. Third, the tobacco buyout and program reform debate needs to remain separate from a massive tobacco product regulatory debate like the one we saw in 1998.

The current program has served tobacco-growing families quite well since the 1930's and has been modified and improved several times through the years; however, the last major overhaul was in 1986, and I believe it is time to take a new look at the program. Historically, the federal tobacco program has worked well to keep supply in line with demand. Since 1986, growers and buyers alike